

REMARKS OF FRANCISCO AVILA

Meeting of L.A. Valley Historical Museum Association

October 6, 1975

Dodson: The following tape was made at a meeting of the Los Angeles College Historical Association. The fact that it was recorded at the meeting, explains the poor quality of the tape.

The meeting was held on October 6, 1975, the speaker was Mr. Francisco Avila who was ranch foreman for the Lankershim family. Mr. Avila has been one of the most important supporters of the Los Angeles Valley College Historical Museum, a very generous donor to the museum and Vice President of the Museum Association.

Introduction: It should be said that alot of times the passing years destroy the memories of people but Frank was one that fought for the intention of Lankershim Blvd. where some people wanted to change it to Universal Blvd. Because he wanted to keep alive this memory of the past of the Valley. So, it is with great pride that I present this to you, friends and let me introduce him as our speaker of the day.
Applause...

Francisco: Ladies and gentlemen, first of all, I want to thank each and everyone of you for this honor. Which I would like to honor my wife.

Maria: That's me!
Applause...

Francisco: Maria who know's just as I do about the Valley because she came to the Valley in 1922 and we married in North Hollywood in 1929. It will be 46 years this coming November. I went to work for the Lankershims in 1929, it was in June the 18th of 1929. And I work for them and lived them til June the 25th of 1950. I lived and worked with on the lavish country home. We used to call it a ranch, but it really was a country home. Here on Lankershim and Ventura Blvd. I would say it was about a quarter of a mile south of Ventura Blvd. and a about a quarter of a mile west of Lankershim Blvd. And I can they were one of the nicest people that anybody would like to work for, because we treated like one of the family. I lost my job in 1950 was because the last of the Lankershims died in 1948, it was Doria C. Lankershim. And of course they had to settle the estate in 1950, that's when I lost my job. But if any of you like to ask me about the family or I would like to answer if I can.

Question: What was the origin of their name, was it a German name?

Francisco: I would say it was German, because Mr. Isaac Lankershim, the one who came to the Valley in 1869 and bought 60 thousand acres from Andres Pico. He came from Bavaria. I suppose that's Germany. And then, he had a girl and a boy, it was Susan Lankershim, the letter he gave me says Van Nuys and Colonel J.B. Lankershim had two of them. Then Colonel J.B. Lankershim had two, it was Jack Lankershim and Doria Lankershim. And I was hired by Jack Lankershim, the grandson of Isaac Lankershim

that came from Germany. And is there anything, something that you want to ask me?

Question: I would like to know if you know anything about the Lankershim's having a home at approximately Camerillo and Denton?

Francisco: No mam.

Woman: Well, the reason I wondered, there's a house there that's a hundred years old, between seventy-five and one hundred. And people that live there, as a matter of fact they just purchased this old home. And Uh, I was told that it was one of the Lankershim houses. So the only thing that I could find at the library trying to research it was Lankershim bought part of the Maclay holdings. Do you know anything about that?

Francisco: Well, all I know that I Isaac Lankershim bought more or less it was fifty-nine acres or so but it was south of Vanowen and all the way from Cahuenga Pass pass Calabasas and over the hill on Mulholland Drive.

Woman: Well somewhere there was a Lankershim that own's this house because the people that lived in it were familiar with Mrs. Potter who lived here since 1951. and just moved away. And their son went to school with the Weddington's. The Weddington's did a big research on the Lankershim's and come to find ~~XX~~ out that was one of their houses. So I wondered if you knew about it.

Francisco: No. I never heard of it.

Woman: It's really big. It's got a big attic and ...

Francisco: No mam, I never heard of it.

Woman: We got a construction man to go in there and he said, "Everything is made perfect, I can find your papers in the city hall, you've got the big beams, you don't have to tear it down or make it over."

Francisco: I would say that the house that we lived here at the Lankershim ranch, it was built like you say.

Woman: Now where was that located? Off of Ventura?

Francisco: Well yes about a quarter of a mile south of Ventura Blvd. and a quarter of a mile west of Lankershim Blvd. People couldn't see it because there was a knoll right in front of this particular place.

Woman: You wouldn't happen to know this half an acre of ground this particular house is on.

Francisco: No.

Woman: It's on Camarillo and into Denton, it has trees around it, it has those Sycamore trees, the most gorgeous things I ever saw.

Francisco: This house where we lived in, why it was built we'll say four by fours, they were full four by fours. It was one by twelve. Not three quarters by eleven and a half and our ceilings were ten feet high all through the house. And it had twenty-two rooms. It was built like a "U". So Jack Lankershim lived on one side and we had eleven rooms for our own selves, just married. We only just the den, the bedroom, and the kitchen. Later on we had a daughter and we used one more bedroom. Then we little by little we began furnishing the whole thing and it was terrific, it was too much!

Woman: Well, this has an attic that those people used for a dormitory for their four sons, an old fashion attic and it was boarded in, you know.

Francisco: I'll tell you about this property. When I went to work for them, they had a driveway that went up on Lankershim to Ventura Blvd., not to the house and they had Olive trees on both sides of their driveway and there was another driveway that went up Ventura and Vineland, the same with Olive trees on both sides of the driveway. Then it met right in front of the house, then it went around the house, then it went on a kind of a triangle up to the barns and up to the guest house. And if you want to talk about fruit, you can find any kind of fruit except bananas. But it was really out of this world, you know to work and live with this type of people because they treat you like one of the family.

Question: What uh, exactly what business were the Lankershim's in?

Francisco: Real Estate.

Question: What sort of work did you do?

Francisco: I used to take care of, I was a caretaker for the place. When I was hired, I worked under Mr. Bringle. He was the caretaker before I went to work for them. Then he had a light heart attack, so the Lankershim's gave a home for him and his wife to live as long as they live free of everything. And of course, probably they didn't want him to die on the place. Then I took over. I ran the whole thing, I was in charge of the Lankershim ranch, we called it a ranch, I hired and fired. I had a free hand to do as I pleased.

Question: What kind of people did you hire?

Francisco: Well, it takes, well, we had about an acre of walnuts. Well, uh, I didn't want them to go to waste, so it was about the only thing that I picked and I hired people to help me pick em, you know. And if I get too much work because you take a place that had two hundred and sixty rose bushes, that was tree, the bush, and the climber. And then you have fruits. I want to tell you about the fruits, if we have the time. Let's start with persimmons, we have the crabapple, green apple, yellow apple, peaches, plums, Santa Rosa, Sassoona Plums, figs, the black and white, strawberries, blackberries, youngberries, walnuts, hazelnuts, cherries, yellow and the red, we had lowquats, pears, oranges, the naval, and the Valencia, we had two kinds of limes kumquats, mangos.

Maria: We had everything!! We had everything, period!!

Francisco: In otherwords, it was everything except bananas and everything went to waste, except the walnuts that I used to pick. And of course it was such a big place, you know, that uh.

Voice from audience: Tell em about takin all those trees down when they wanted to put in a golf course down there, you know on this Lakeside.

Francisco: It was something else but the Lankershim ranch, why uh, do you know anymore about the Lankershim ranch, I could go on forever.

Question: Pardon me, how many children did the Lankershim's have?

Francisco: Well, uh, the last of the Lankershim Jack and Doria were the grandson or the granddaughter and grandson of Isaac Lankershim. They had none.

Question: They died out then, with that generation?

Francisco: The last died in 1948, was Doria C. Lankershim.

Question: When was the house torn down?

Francisco: The house wasn't torn down. It was moved. After I moved, somebody bought it, somebody bought it then they cut it in half. And I don't know where my half went. but I can tell you where the other half is, Jack's. It's a church up at Northridge. It's on the southeast corner of Nordhoff and Topanga Cyn. They call it The Little Church of the Canyon.

Question: Where was that again sir?

Francisco: That's Nordhoff and Topanga Canyon. It's on the SouthEast corner. They have a little round house that we used to have at the ranch, we had a round house at the end of the garden. And they had that too for meditation. And you were welcome there anytime you want to go. And I wish you could see part of the Lankershim house. In 1926, I went to work for the golfcourse, Lakeside. But I was the start of it when we started pullin out trees, walnuts and other type of fruit trees. And we started piling it up in big piles as big as this room. And they we'd burn it up, it used to burn for weeks. After that was burned down, I mean cleared up, we started building the greens, the traps, and so forth and so on. Until the golfcourse was complete. It was in Toluca Lake.

Question: Toluca Lake where the Lakeside golfcourse is?

Francisco: Uh uh.

Question: That was on the Lankershim land?

Francisco: No.

Voice: That was property of Freebert, Begman, and Clawbridge(?).

Francisco: Right.

And I thought uh, you know, I was working for the golfcourse when I heard about this opening with the Lankershims. And I heard quite abit of how wealthy they were and how nice people the were, so I quit, and went to work for the Lankershim's and I think I made a good move. I made a good move to go work for those people, they were really kind.

Question: What was the total acreage of the Lankershim Ranch?

Francisco: To start with?

Questioner: To start with and then at the end.

Francisco: At the end, when I lost my job? It was one hundred and sixty acres.

Question: To start with?

Francisco: Uh, we say sixty thousand acres.

Sixty-thousand acres but they started selling it in parcels, big parcels. And what was ~~XXXXXX~~ left that was what sold when I left them.

Maria: And he bought that acreage for less than two dollars an acre. That's right sixty thousand acres for one hundred and fifteen thousand.

Francisco: I will tell more about Colonel J.B. Lankershim. He donated ten acres of land to the boy scouts of America in 1919 over on Mulholland Drive, but actually it's on Mary, what's the name of the....

Maria: Nichols Canyon, Oh here I have the picture here!

Francisco: See in turn, the boyscouts built a monument for J.B. Lankershim. We have the picture of that monument.

Maria: May I say one thing please?

Colonel Lankershim gave the boyscouts of America ten acres of land in May 2, 1919. And of course the boys were there, so when Colonel Lankershim died, there the boyscouts of America built a monument which is now in Nichols Canyon. Here is the picture of it. It's been abandoned, I don't know what was there before, but it has been abandoned. We have this pioneer of the Valley and people did not care, they did not know nothing about it, until when we uh, they wanted to change Lankershim Blvd. to Universal and then my husband said, "No, we're gonna fight this. So I got in touch with the Mexicans, and native people and people that were not even natives. And we formed for the name for Lankershim. And so we went and we had meetings and at these meetings, we had them in our home, then people would coming to my home, you see, when my husband, when he was about to retire, we received this letter from my doctor and we had all of the Lankershim's furnishings that we had at the ranch. And we didn't know what to do so many things, so plows we gave away, signs, we threw away in the dump, some we kept. It's very true, very true. And uh, then uh, they were just like one of our people, I mean it was just like my family, because we lived with neighbors, they treated us as one of the family. Any trouble they had, they used to come and tell us what was going and everything, he used to call us children, Because at that time, I was very young, I was only sixteen. I was there for twenty one more years, but then, um when we had these meetings at the house, every Friday, I think sometimes, may be somehow, why this thing happened that these people tried to change Lankershim to Universal, maybe this was a because we had all these beautiful things that belonged to these people and we did not know it, they belonged to these Spaniard family. And, as people used to come my meetings over at my house, and used to say "Oh! what beautiful things." "This is one of a kind in this Valley!" This is what started the whole thing, now we find out we have a huge thing, we have a huge thing that belongs to the Valley. Belongs to all of the people here in the Valley, we have it here in our home. If any of you people want to come and look at some of the things that belonged to this wonderful family, you can come and see them anytime. Just let me know you are coming over and we'll be waiting for you.

Question: I want to know what happened to the estate. There is a lot of money made and Doria Lankershim died in 1948.

Francisco: Well, I'll tell you what happened, Jack Lankershim died in 1946, he was married and had no children. So, his wife inherited his part of the estate.

Question: What about the daughter?

Francisco: Mrs. Lankershim died in 1948, and everything is tied up on the boat. She had an adopted daughter that you can see on this picture, we have a picture of her, she had an adopted daughter. She only draws a hundred thousand dollars a year to live on, from the estate, and the estate is growing right along. When she's gone, I understand, everything goes to UCLA, for research. That's Mrs. millions, but Jack's went to his wife and she died in 1969 in Beverly Hills, and I don't know what happened. She had a lot of relatives and probably they

inherited everything.

Maria: But the Lankershim people they make their money in real estate and they leave their money for the people because leave it to UCLA research and then to the one in Boston, But this money is going to help humanity, this is the way it's happened.

Voice: Thanks Frank, and thanks to his wife, Did you have another question that you wanted?

Voice: Well, I could expand a little bit on the boy scout camp. That was donated by Lankershim land, but the furnishings were all furnished by Arthur Letts, who was a department store in Los Angeles, for the benefit of the Los Angeles and Hollywood boyscouts, us guys in the Valley didn't have a shot at it. I know, I was there.

Francisco: Well, uh,

Voice: They allowed the, after there was two troops, or three troops in the Valley. And they were allowed to go up there and camp on the outskirts and use the toilet facilities, and swimming pool.

Voice: Well, I wanted Frank to tell a little about the digging up of the trees on the golfcourse because I worked right across Valley Spring Lane when we built all those turkey houses for Bagard (?) and fenced all that twenty acres in part of which Bob Hope's on and we used to go across the ranch and get the apple cider that had been sitting a little while. (Laughter)

Francisco: Well, uh,

Voice: Duke asked him some more questions. I noticed Phyllis Roberts is come in and uh, I think I've got something here that's uh maybe I have, anyway, yea. I've got a certificate here that's uh for your good health, Phyllis, if you don't mind coming up. (Applause)

Phyllis has brought a lot of pictures to me which copied so that we could have some in the museum.

Phyllis: I want to say thank you to Chuck because you know I see you are passing the No. Hollywood book along the table and I could never have done that book if it hadn't been for the help that Chuck gave me. And as you all know there's going to be a book published about the San Fernando Valley and I believe the publication date has now been set for January and I never in the world could have done the pictures and work that asked of me for the publication of that book if it had not been for the great help of this gentlemen and we certainly thank your society and we thank you for doing this. And our No. Hollywood Chamber thanks you too.

Maria: Mam, were the person that called me that wanted to know when Isaac Lankershim was born?

Phyllis: You know, I tell ya, I made so many, a hundred phone calls, when I was getting this book ready.

Maria: We have the correct information.

Phyllis: Well, there's been many people who contributed to this but it was my responsibility to get the material ready.

Maria: But were you the person that called me?

Phyllis: I don't know because I made so many phone calls that I just couldn't tell you. I made an unbelievable amount of phone call, it just went on for weeks. The same with the History book that is being produced and the pictures. But Mr. Tayloe has very graciously done all the copying for us and one thing and another for us, he's gotten a lot of history for us.

Maria: Do you work for the San Fernando, uh...

Phyllis: No, I work for the North Hollywood chamber of commerce. And I'm an elected there again, so I was doing that as a community project. Then I was bi-centennial chairman through to 1977 for anything that goes in No. Hollywood, I represent No. Hollywood on the Mayor Bradley office, the bi-centennial office. Thank you very much.

Chet: Thank you Phyllis! I've got a couple of more here, Joeseeph Horden and Hails(?) Kirkpatrick, and I don't think they're here, are they? But Dr. Robert Borden (?) is here and uh we want to honor him by giving him the certificate and let him take the others to them. I might say that I've known this fellow, well it goes way back when, and his brother worked for me as a security man many years ago. So, congradulations, and I'm glad you started even though you did put me to work.

Maria:

Chet: I'm going to pass it on to my co-chairman, and put her to work. Thank you very much, I don't know if any of these others are, Floyd Ballman(?), Chuck Curtis, Gene Earhart(?), Gladhill, Rose Naisey(?), John Sanco(?), I see his name in here, I guess I'll just pull one out. Geez, I have my name on this one. Applause H.L. Wright, well, I don't know they bother with me, I did fix a couple of diaramas, where are they in the library?

Dodson: There are still in the library, we have not moved anything down to bungalow 15 yet because of the security problem. We want to put grill work on the windows before we move things down.

Chet: Are we going to go down for a visit today?

Dodson: We had first thought that we would have that grill work and move things down, but we've not been able to do it yet, so I would like to postpone the tour of those facilities until the next meeting.

Chet: Some of you might be interested then, in the alcove of the library, I guess it's open, isn't it? Go in and take a look at some of the pictures I make a copy of the little diarama, the No. Hollywood station, as of 1920. I'll put a little red streetcar on it a little later on. In back of it is a picture that station that was taken in from the roof of that station in 1889. It adds to it a little bit, and under the dairy there. There were alot of dairies all around the Valley, as I recall. So, it's been very interesting. Well, Austin have you got anything, go ahead, I see your hand up.

Austin: One point, I think the whole committed should know about. That is our fine curator, Dr. Dodson, who's going around making his valuable time throughout the Valley, and incurring expenses and other things that we should reimburse him for. But he has been spreading goodwill and making Valley College's Historical Museum well known. We are going to reap alot of fine benefits from him. He is to be applauded for doing this all on his own. without direct at all and I do believe that he should be reimbursed for his expenses. Why don't we give him a hand! (Round of applause)

Chet: I think when we get this little deal set up in here, we can go put the fee on two or three people that I have in mind. Or maybe we'll get a little more cash in there! But we do appreciate it, we all have to put some effort in there to put this thing over and many of you have done a tremendous job. With the pictures and I'd be glad to copy and try to get them, I've made many contacts myself, and there are many historical set-ups within the valley. I'm working with some of them to give us a share with them when we get set up. But some of theirs, maybe we can share with them. Yes?

Woman: Right now there isn't anything in the alcove of the library because we moved most of the pictures to catalog them and to cross reference them and they should be put back in a couple of days. If you really want to see them, the catalog department is open.

Chet: Oh no, we don't have to now, wait until you get them up.

Maria: Uh sir, do you only take pictures? Do you take artifacts at all?

Chet: Anything, yes! Sure! We've got some, I've got these diaramas over there, we've got other things that are in there. The more the merrier, we have hopes! We hope, he was talking about the grill work, so we've got proper protection down in bungalow 16 and once we get that...the two of you are going to hear from us!

(Private conversation between Dr. Dodson and Francisco)

Chet: May I. I've talked to this chap a quite awhile now, I've been putting the be on him but we've got to have security down and their working on that. George, I'm going to call on you in a minute, but I called on Phyllis Roberts a minute ago, and I think she would like to make an announcement, wouldn't you Phyllis?

Phyllis: About which, about the cameras?

Chet: Yes! You're talkin about our thing.

Phyllis: This camera was used in the film pictures that were in the press that were in the San Francisco earthquake. So, it is an historic camera. He has another one, that he says is going to be very interesting.

Chet: You make a date, and I'll come pick them up. And incidently, I will see to it that another camera that took a wide angle view. Make a date with me.

Maria is speaking, but unfortunately, Dr. Dodson and Mr. Avila are having a private conversation in front of the mic and it is unable to distinguish her conversation.

FORMAL MEETING HAD ENDED AT THIS POINT. THE CONFUSION AFTER THE MEETING MAKE IT IMPOSSIBLE TO TRANSCRIBE THE REST OF THE TAPE.

Note: Chet refers to Mr. Chester Tayloe, the president of the Museum Association, and Maria refers to Maria Avila, the wife of Mr. Francisco Avila.